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ECCLESIASTICAL LAW.

(A THESIS.)

BY

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ECCLESIASTICAL LAW.



HE term, Ecclesiastical Law, is used here not merely, as in England, to describe the laws made by Parliament for the regulation of the Established Church, but in its widest sense, as including all law relating to religion.

There is in Canada, as in other lands, much variety in the constitutions, rules and regulations of different churches. Are there any underlying lines of unity along which it is possible that they might flow together into one strong constitution, adequate to all the demands that can come against a church? This inquiry must lead us back to the origin of Christianity.

The great founder of the Christian religion attempted no organization of His followers into anything like the church of modern times. He set up no visible model before the coming ages. He created no permanent positions of pre-eminence among His people. He defined no clear lines along which, externally, His growing body should develop itself.

After the work of teaching Christianity to the world fell wholly into the hands of the apostles, some

signs of organization began to appear. But these inspired teachers evidently had before their minds no definite plan of the future structure, as it was to be in every age, with all its varied appointments, and their respective relations to each other.

The organization of Christianity, the integration of different parts, the bringing together of many congregations, and even of wide territories, under one jurisdiction, the creation of officers, superior and inferior, with the definitions of duty pertaining to each, and fixing their proper relations, until the church was one compact body, all its parts subject to one head, and working together with military effectiveness,—all this came only after centuries of growth, under changing conditions, according to the suggestions of practical necessity, or as cherished ambitions, or personal animosities succeeded in burning their impress upon the rising structure.

THE LAITY.*

In the Christian dispensation, the Jewish idea of a wide distinction between the priesthood and the people,

* Neander, "Church History," Section II.

"The laity have also the right to administer the sacraments, and to teach in the community. The Word of God and the sacraments were, by the grace of God, communicated to all, and may, therefore, be communicated by all Christians as instruments of the Divine grace."—*Tertullian, in De Baptismo.*

"All were accustomed to teach and to baptize."—*Coleman, The Apostolical and Primitive Church.*

Mosheim, Cent. I., Part II.

was succeeded by the conception of a whole church set apart—sanctified to God—every member of it, after the manner of Christ, offering Himself a sacrifice for holy service. All belonged to a common priesthood. Any members of the church were competent to administer the sacraments. All might teach the Word who had the gifts necessary for that work. No distinction was made between the sacred and the secular in the Christian profession. The principle of perfect equality in all things was fully recognized. When distinctions arose from necessity, and some must take the lead and direct the affairs of the church, those who filled these chief positions were elected thereto by common consent. Their election, not ordination, stamped them as called of God to their peculiar work. The laying on of hands originally signified the solicitation in prayer of a spiritual gift, and was not regarded as the creation of an order, or the bestowment of an office.

It is evident that in the absence of any precepts or instructions from the Lord upon the subject, the ideas of the time in respect to church government could not but be of the simplest possible nature. Anything like a monarchical system stood at the remotest point removed from the thoughts of the age.

THE CLERGY.

While yet the eldest of the apostles remained with the church, the pastoral office had taken shape, and the existence of the "Angel" of the churches, mentioned in the Apocalypse, indicates that at least the first germ

of episcopal supervision had been planted. The office of pastor was a creation of necessity. From the beginning the converts in the same city or neighborhood were brought together into intimate association by one impulse. They were united in the bonds of a common sympathy, by belief in the same truths, by the effort to attain the same ends, and by exposure to the same difficulties, dangers, privations and sufferings. The appointment of suitable persons to superintend these churches was inevitable in the nature of things. The Christians most interested made the selection, and they would naturally look to the more elderly men, as having the piety, wisdom, and stability needed in such positions, as well as because they would be the leaders in a community, and so would bring influence to the young church. Accordingly, as descriptive of their character, the Greek words are applied to them which mean respectively, "elders," "leading men," and, by a figure, "shepherds," and sometimes they are called "overseers," or "bishops," as descriptive of their duties; but they are never designated by the word which means "to rule."

The functions of this early pastoral office are not very clearly defined in the New Testament. It certainly was not just what it is now. One difference has already been indicated, in respect to the administration of the sacraments. The apostolic office was not perpetuated in the pastor, for that included much more. The apostles embodied in themselves the whole church in all its appointments. But they designated none to be in any official sense their successors. They

left no open door through which a succession of men, holding after them supreme authority, could legitimately enter. The first pastors were cut to a narrower pattern. They were, like Moses, a sort of magistrates as well as preachers, but their authority was of a low order. They could go no farther than arbitration. Indeed, as late as the middle of the fifth century, this office held no higher power than that of arbitration in disputes. A law of Constantine commanded civil officers to enforce awards made by bishops acting in the capacity of arbitrators.*

The subsequent development of the ecclesiastical system was little more than a steady enlargement of the functions and powers of the pastoral office. Out of a region so marked as this is by the crossing tracks of heated discussion and unsettled disputes, it is difficult to bring anything so clear as not to be subject to contradiction; but it is probable that men's thoughts were at the same time undergoing a change on a number of points, and when we have traced one outward visible change all along its way, we will discover that it corresponds to changes in thought on several particulars which has gone on without observation.

Take as an illustration of this the development of the idea that a bishop is a different office from a presbyter. For obvious reasons the first congregations were gathered in cities, and from thence villages and neighborhoods were reached by the messengers of the truth. The presbyters or bishops of churches in cities were

* Hallam, Middle Ages, Cap. VII.

likely to be more learned and wiser in council than the men who sustained the same relation to village churches; and this superiority being silently recognized by the smaller churches, these men gained easily and naturally an ascendancy over all the churches near to their own city. It was only a moral superiority, but in one century the pastor who exercised an advisory oversight of a number of churches was distinguished as a bishop, from a presbyter whose attention was given exclusively to one congregation. The distinction was known at a date so early, but it was not then universal.

Now, underlying this distinction is another, which had been quietly growing up, that is, a defining line between the clergy and the laity. The clergy have risen up out of the laity, and have become a separate class. They have come to be regarded as filling a sacred office, while the laity are secular. The ideas involved in this division were growing simultaneously with those which created a division of the clergy into different ranks.

Then with the recognition of the clergy as essentially distinct from the laity, would come the notion of ordination as a designation to an office, as well as the creation of a distinct order. Then the moral ascendancy of one clergyman over another, at first tacitly acknowledged, would easily become a claim to be so recognized as a right. One step further on we have the fully developed Pope—supreme in matters temporal as well as spiritual.

LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL FUNCTIONS ASSUMED.

From the development of the purely pastoral functions of the clergy, we pass on to the rapid development of legislative and judicial functions in their office.

The importance of ecclesiastical councils in the settlement of disputes was recognized as early as the middle of the second century. The first universal council was held A.D. 325, to consider the Arian heresy, and was attended by 318 bishops. After this none of the clergy of rank inferior to the bishop had any place in the great councils, except when, in the absence of their bishops, they were there to represent them. Now, seeing that the church was subject to the legislation of bodies constituted almost solely of bishops, it is easy to understand the rapid development of both the episcopacy and the papacy. No canons would be enacted restraining the ambition of the bishops against the rights both of the lower orders of the clergy and of the laity. The appetite for ecclesiastical privilege and power, now fully aroused, ever crying "give," and never satisfied, could be put under no restraint from the legislative authority of the church. Never relaxing its hold, it every day took one step nearer to its coveted object. We have some idea of the force of this pressure upon the lower ranks in the church, and of the extent to which the spiritual was crowding the secular, in the fact that the great Charlemagne, who was very much disposed to use the clergy, instead of being used by them, began

a decree with the words: "The most pious lord our king has decreed, with the consent of the most holy Synod," etc., etc. The decree in question was thoroughly secular in its nature. It related to the fixing of a maximum price upon agricultural products.*

The canon law was equally remarkable for its rapid growth and for the increasing variety of subjects with which it dealt, until at last its enactments covered almost the whole field of legislative authority.

It was then not difficult to press this law into the administration of justice. Justinian yielded so far to the strong pressure brought upon him in this direction, as to command that all civil suits brought against ecclesiastics of any degree should be settled by the bishops. One point after another was claimed and yielded, until finally Charlemagne relieved the whole body of the clergy from any responsibility to the judicial authority of the civil power. This constituted what is known in history as the "benefit of clergy."† It secured every one in any way connected with the clerical estate against any penalties from a civil tribunal, no matter what offence he might have committed. He was accountable only to the ecclesiastical courts, but these could not impose as heavy penalties as the civil courts. Here was an important distinction in favor of the clerical fraternity. The next step was to enlarge this favored class from little to more. This was done so effectually, that at one time in England every person who could read was exempt

* Guizot, Hist. Civ. Lec. XXI.

† Hallam, Middle Ages, Cap. VII.

from appearing before any tribunal but the ecclesiastical courts.

The cunning device by which the clergy got almost the entire administration of justice into their own hands is interesting. It was readily conceded that they should hear all spiritual causes. Then the contention was maintained that all causes were spiritual, inasmuch as they involved the commission of sin; and it was the duty of the church to prevent sin as far as possible, and to punish it whenever it had been committed. Working on this principle, one council, assembled in an obscure town, enacted that no illegitimate prince should be allowed to ascend the throne. The council claimed that the enactment was within its authority, because it was the church's duty to prevent sin. By such maxims it was easy to subjugate the whole world.

But this assumption by the church of all legislative and judicial powers proved a great help to civilization. The ignorance of the masses of men would have allowed a continuous reign of savagery had it not been for the church's encroachments. As it was, the practice of government fell into the hands of those who alone knew anything of law, history, or philosophy. But for them the rulers of the earth would have been savage chiefs, incapable of writing their own laws, or of reading edicts which others had written. Hence mankind may be thankful for what in this age of general intelligence seems like a monstrous assumption; and which was put away when men had become educated to the duties of a better type of civilization. Then, as gradu-

ally civil society became worthy to govern, and competent for the duties thereof, it found all the necessary forms already provided by the church. The dominion of one primate suggested one throne of executive power in the nation. Ecclesiastical assemblies gave the idea of national parliaments. The canons of the church taught men to frame national statutes and systems of public law.

CAUSES OF THE GROWTH OF ECCLESIASTICAL INFLUENCE.

We may just mention, in passing, the chief causes which conspired to exalt ecclesiastical enactments to such paramount influence in the world.

The first was the unity of the church. As contrasted with the present time, the church bore upon any point toward which it aimed with the impulse of its whole weight.

A second cause was the predominance of the religious society over the civil. There was a clear line of division between them. They had a constant contention against each other. But the society within the church held the ascendancy over that without. It had all the learning, and possessed exclusively the sources of knowledge. And the bishops ruled the church, so that laws enacted by them easily commanded the whole world.

Add a third cause, found in the fact of personal rule. Kings held their dominion, not over certain prescribed territories as now, but over their own peoples, wherever they might be. The King of the Franks, for example, was not the king of all who might dwell

within the boundaries of the modern France, for he had no such boundaries; but he was the king of all the Franks, whether living in what is now called France, or Germany, or Italy. With the prevalence of such ideas of government, it was but natural that the legislation of the church should be recognized by all Christians as their peculiar law, no matter where they might dwell. So that the generally accepted supremacy of the Pope was not so much the result of an invasion of the prerogative of monarchs as a natural development upon the theory of government entertained and practised by monarchs themselves. The canons, especially of the councils held after the dismemberment of the empire, did not invade the rights of legitimate monarchs by asserting authority within their territories; but they were simply accepted by Christian people everywhere as their appropriate law; and the ideas which prevailed at the time made it impossible to comprehend such a thing as resistance to the practice. It was consistent with the notions of the age that the Pope should claim jurisdiction over all Christians, no matter to what king they might acknowledge political allegiance.

THE NATIONAL CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

This great church is the most interesting example of a national religious establishment; and illustrates the relation of state churches to ecclesiastical legislation. Its history is deeply involved in the moral and political struggles of the ages. A conflict is ever in progress in human thought between new ideas and the

old. In the latter part of the Middle Ages new ideas were growing up as to the proper field for the authority of kings. Feudalism, like all systems, passed away by degrees. Instead of peoples held together by the personal allegiance of the weaker to the stronger in different ranks, all subject to one supreme lord, stable monarchies gradually established their power within territories clearly defined by geographical boundaries. Mankind had learned that if one primate could rule the whole church from Rome, then one king could rule from his capital all the people in all the territories he could conquer.

Then men at last awoke to the fact that the acceptance of canons of ecclesiastical councils, and of the decretals of Popes, not by any means confined to spiritual matters, by all Christians under every monarchy, was at variance with the new spirit beginning to prevail. Hence a long feud, affecting all Europe, and running through centuries, between the Popes and reigning monarchs. An important chapter of ecclesiastical history embraces the story of that conflict from the side of the church as representing the old ideas.

Our chief interest lies in the manifestations of this struggle on English soil, and as it affected the church there. England undoubtedly had a national church as far back as the seventh century. Then Rome sent a monk, a Greek—one Theodore of Tarsus—to England, to assume the position of Archbishop of Canterbury, whose duty was to bring England under subjection to her authority. From that time forward the English Church acknowledged the supremacy of the

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Roman primate. It was as thoroughly Roman Catholic as any church in continental Europe. So it continued for centuries. But the relation between the church and the state was in England an old field of dispute. The contention was at white heat as early as the days of King John. The king claimed the right of nominating the bishops. The church resented the claim. The Pope interfered, and assumed that the appointing of the bishops belonged to himself. After he had done his utmost, by excommunicating the king, and placing the kingdom under an interdict, and then giving it away to a rival, Philip of France; the king gave to his armed barons the Magna Charta, and so peace was restored. The first article in this charter provides for the freedom of the church—"Quod Anglicana ecclesia libera sit."*

Nevertheless, for a long time after this, the acknowledgment of the Pope's supremacy was not considered inconsistent with a free church. A victory had been gained over the crown, and that sufficed for the time. It remained for Henry VIII. to declare the independence of the church in England of the Pope. He had determined to be separated from his queen, Catharine of Arragon, and, with strange inconsistency, he desired a religious sanction for the great wrong. This the Pope refused, and hence the breach. No lover of freedom can be proud of the king's motive in the contention, or can remember with gratitude that his passion was the moving cause in the break between the church

* Langmead, English Constitutional History, Cap. IV.

in England and the Pope; but there is some relief in the reflection that Henry was only the occasion of a conflict which was inevitable any way, and was then imminent, only waiting for a suitable opening to begin.

With the conversion of the English king to the reformation purely from motives of policy, it is interesting to trace the progress of spiritual reform in the church of the land. Does it properly take rank as one of the churches of Protestantism? Some claim that it was the same church in all essential particulars before the Reformation which it now is. Entertaining, personally, a reverence for the history, character and influence of that great church which would allow to it almost any claim that might be set forth, except exemption from the right and privilege of being criticised by contemporaries, it is still necessary to accept such authorities as Hallam* and Macaulay,† who recognize in the present Church of England the effect of a compromise wrought by Cranmer, as a courtier on behalf of the government on one side, and Cranmer, as a divine, on behalf of the Calvinists, on the other side. The former of these authorities indicates that the doctrinal and moral reformation of the church in England was far from complete, notwithstanding it was the subject of some sweeping changes in matters of the gravest importance. The use of the Latin language in the public service gave place to the English tongue. Images were removed from the churches. Prayers to the saints, which had been

* Constitutional History, Cap. II. † History of England, Cap. I.

customary, especially to the virgin, and prayers for the souls of the dead, were discontinued. Auricular confession was abolished. Transubstantiation was denied, and the bread and wine in the sacrament were regarded as merely emblems. The celibacy of the clergy was no longer required. If there had been nothing more, these great changes were sufficient to constitute it a reformed church. Its outward constitution was certainly not greatly altered. It had been ruled by an episcopacy, and episcopacy it retained in its integrity. But the rights and functions of the clergy of every grade were modified and abbreviated; still it remained in most particulars the same constitution the church had borne for ages. And what it was when the first throes of the Reformation were ended that it is to-day.

The Reformation left the church on English soil free and independent so far as any foreign control was concerned, but the supremacy was only transferred from a foreign Pope to the king. The changes since then in the national constitution have been such that now the supremacy of the king means the supremacy of parliament. This authority extends as fully as ever the pretensions of the Pope did into all purely spiritual matters. It is supreme even in what relates to the substance of the faith, and to the forms of religious service. A statute of the time of the Reformation enacted that convocation "should henceforth make no provincial canons, constitutions or ordinances, without the royal assent and license." This limitation of the legislative authority of the church has been steadfastly

maintained until the present time. The two convocations of Canterbury and York are simply provincial assemblies without legislative power. They can enforce nothing without the approbation of the crown. And a license must be granted to them covering whatever is the subject of their recommendations even.

As an illustration of the extent to which the church is subject to the secular power, even in things purely spiritual in their nature, take the case of the Prayer Book. After the Restoration, this book was revised so as to adapt it to some new conditions which had arisen. When the revisions had been accepted by the Convocation of York, the book so revised was sanctioned by parliament, and appointed as the service book in all the churches of the realm. This Prayer Book of 1661 is the Prayer Book of to-day; and in England both convocations cannot make any change in it without the approval of the parliament and crown. Now here is certainly a matter as spiritual as anything which can be the subject of human thought, and yet the decision of the two convocations, reached after separately considering the whole subject, is not sufficient until ratified by parliament.

And parliament does not consider itself under any moral obligation to sanction what is recommended by convocation, as seen, for example, in its action relative to the canons of 1603. They are a body of canons relating to and regulating almost every subject of practical importance in the work of the church, and they are accepted by the bishops and clergy, and quoted as authority in the English ecclesiastical courts.

In 1861, license was granted to convocation to amend one of these canons. After due consideration, both houses of both convocations agreed upon a substitute, which, when submitted to the crown, was sent back to be still further amended, and its substance made more acceptable.

This great church is, therefore, not free and independent, but is subject to the authority of the national legislature, even in things that relate to the faith which it accepts, and the forms of service which it uses.

This church stands as a monument illustrating the final result so far of that bitter conflict between old and new ideas of the correct theory of government. At its beginning the church was dominant everywhere. It appointed kings and emperors. By its sanction they held their power. The laws enacted by them and their parliaments went into force by the consent of the ecclesiastical authority. But now we see the gates opening the other way. The supremacy transferred from the Pope to the king so shifted the centre of power, that, henceforth, instead of the church ruling the state, the state ruled the church. Erastianism has swept the track. The march of ideas has gone clear around the circle.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

It is perhaps worth while just to mention in passing the one great exception to this triumph of national authority. The Catholic Church is to-day a body whose ideas and habits of thought are a surviving

remnant of mediæval civilization. It finds itself in a struggle with conditions wholly changed from those under which it had its generation. It is at variance with all the dominant facts and ideas of the present age. It presents the spectacle of a grand and solemn anachronism. It may be that it will continue, with the aid of the most perfect organization the world ever saw, to press its outlawed claims upon the new races who face toward the bright light of to-day, until blows and blood will be necessary to convince it of the impracticable contract it has upon its hands. Of such a conflict there can be but one issue, unless political partizanship dissipates Anglo-Saxon independence and progressiveness to such a degree that they become willing to surrender the ground already gained by precious blood, and to go down under Gallic ignorance and despotism for the sake of retaining the mere name and forms of power. At the feet of the children of to-day fall the fast departing shadows of fathers who sacrificed everything for liberty and truth. If not unworthy of their origin and their time, they will teach this vast mediæval machine, that the sceptre has been snatched from its arrogant hand.

FREE AND INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

All ecclesiastical organizations, outside the national establishments, are free and independent as compared with a state church. The first provision of Magna Charta is fully realized in them. In Article XIX. of the Church of England, we find a definition of the church. It reads, "The visible church of Christ is

a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." That definition carefully avoids any recognition of the differences between the national church and first, the crown, and second, the Pope. It is a strikingly correct definition of what in England is called a non-conformist church. It contains the true conception of a church, being simply a number of persons incorporated together, because they are likeminded in what they believe, in the aims they set before them, and in the work they undertake, seeking wholly for spiritual results. Such a church, so far as legislative authority is concerned, is on the same level as any temperance, or agricultural, or mutual benefit society, which is incorporated by act of parliament. Its legislation can have no other function than to regulate its own organization and existence, and promote the special ends for which it exists. It is a small circle within a greater, with a different centre, formed for a specific purpose. Its laws and regulations can only relate to persons within itself. They have no application to those who do not become members of the body. Any ecclesiastical laws that can exist outside of countries where there is a state church, are generally a subject of indifference to the majority of the people of the land where they exist. They do not belong to the community as a whole.

Such an organization has certain limitations in which a state church is not concerned.

1. Its legislation is limited by the positive laws of the state in which it exists. This is better than to have the state make laws for its internal government, as is the case with a national church. It has only first of all to see that its enactments are all lawful in the land.

The first of the canons of 1603 declares, "The Queen's power within her realms of England, Scotland and Ireland, and all other her dominions and countries, is the highest power under God; to whom all men do by God's laws owe most loyalty and obedience, afore and above all other powers and potentates in earth." This enunciates with sufficient clearness the fact that the laws of churches must accept the limitations of civil statutes. Acts of parliament have always the right of way. They are under no necessity of even knowing that independent churches exist within their jurisdiction. Their framers need not stop to consider any of the regulations and provisions of any body of Christian people; unless, indeed, in a case where some privilege has been secured to a church by positive law. If any collision arises between a church and a national legislature, the church must get out of the way. It cannot keep its feet in any contention with national authority. The affairs of the nation may, as a rule, proceed without any recognition of the most important enactments of any church. The administration of justice is so independent of church laws, that some feeling of surprise is awakened when in some rare and exceptional case, they are called upon to aid in deciding the rights of any citizen.

Under this limitation of a church's legislative authority, there arises a clear distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical rights of every individual. A church cannot interfere with the civil rights of any of its members, nor discharge any from his civil duties, which are the counterpart of his civil rights. Take, for example, the possession of property. Whatever a man owns is his, through his relation to the state. The church to which he belongs cannot, by any act of confirmation of which it is capable, make his right to any property he holds any stronger than it is by the fact that the state recognizes it, and will protect him in his claim against all who attack it. This is his strongest possible hold upon any possession. It follows that no church can take from any of its members a right which the state maintains. Where the conditions of membership, accepted on entrance, include the payment of certain sums, the collection thereof invades no rights; but a church cannot legally levy or collect a tax. That is an interference with the civil right of property. It may pronounce its judgment that its members should pay certain sums, but that judgment is not binding upon any. Those who accept the judgment will pay the amount; but it is then a voluntary act on their part, and not of the nature of a tax. But any individual member of a church will be able successfully to resist the highest legislative body in his church, in refusing to pay any sum it may have levied upon its members, if he dissents from the enactment. Though every other member consents, yet he can refuse, and yet maintain his

membership and rights in the body. It follows, therefore, that it is not merely a matter of choice, because it is deemed the best way, but a matter of necessity, because there is for it no other way, that a church is supported wholly by voluntary offerings.

All these principles are recognized by the "Synod Act" of the Church of England of 1857, and adopted as a part of the church's canons in 1859. Herein the church assumes authority "in matters relating to, and affecting only the said church, and the officers and members thereof." "Nothing in the act shall authorize the imposition of any rate or tax upon any person or persons whomsoever, whether belonging to the said church or not." "Nothing in the said constitutions or regulations, or any of them, shall be contrary to any law or statute now, or hereafter, in force in this province." Herein all the limitations of an independent church are fully stated.

2. The highest legislative authority of an independent church, is particularly limited by special acts of parliament, charters, and deeds of trust, all relating to properties in possession of, and under the direction of, the said church. An institution may be incorporated by special act providing for its control by a board constituted and perpetuated in a certain manner. A university, for example, owned by a church, may work under a charter which provides for its management, including the manner in which its board is appointed, the conditions under which degrees may be conferred, etc., etc. Or a church building or other property may be held in trust for a church, under a deed which con-

tains special provisions for the appointment of the minister who shall officiate therein, or for the use of collections that may be taken, etc., etc.

Now, any such buildings or institutions may be fully owned by the church, but nevertheless its highest legislative authority can enact nothing which is not in harmony with the special acts, charters, or deeds referred to, even when a departure from the provisions they contain would be manifestly greatly to the advantage of the whole church. Before it can proceed it must secure an act or acts of parliament releasing it from the limitation of all previous acts.

For example, the General Conference of the Methodist Church has no more power than an official meeting or a trust board to pass any law which in any way would violate the Act known as 47 Victoria, cap. 106, being, "An Act respecting the Union of certain Methodist Churches therein named."

3. But, having made these exceptions, that the provisions of the civil law must always be respected, a church, free and independent of state control, has the advantage that it may make any regulations for its own government, and for the welfare of its members, which in its wisdom are deemed expedient or necessary. This being the case, we find great variety in the regulations of different churches. There is nothing like uniformity among them. They walk to their goal through different paths. At their threshold they set up different conditions of entrance. Different requirements attend the continuation of membership. Every Protestant church has some peculiar regula-

tions created by the circumstances through which it came into existence, but which cannot be regarded as consistently and only aimed at sin, or calculated solely for the promotion of holiness. They stand as historic monuments, but no wise man would ever devise them originally as calculated more than anything else to reach the sinner or bless the saint. It is said that no person can be a legal member of the Methodist Church who does not attend the class meeting with reasonable regularity. The celibacy of probationers for the ministry, and the great system of itinerancy are striking peculiarities. With some churches no person can be admitted to membership until his whole body has been immersed in water, and none but their own members can join these churches at the table of the Lord. Such laws are quite admissible, because they violate no man's civil rights or duties. They interest only the persons who are members of the particular church in which they exist. Presbyterianism remains true to its inheritance in the Westminster Confession of Faith, though the nations have with wonderful unanimity outgrown some of its provisions, as, for example, the principle that a man may not marry any nearer relative of his deceased wife than of himself. So also it refuses to baptize any child unless one of its parents is a believer. The Church of England in Canada is as free as any of the other churches; but is naturally bound by feelings of loyalty to the mother church in England, and, therefore, in doctrine and in forms of service this church is not likely to introduce changes until the example is set by the parent body.

It is probable that a by no means industrious search would bring to light that some excellent persons have been kept from becoming members of each church because of those peculiarities which do not make it more effective in its war against sin. But such a discovery would neither prove that these things are wise or unwise. Any church has a right to make and enforce these regulations because they affect only its own members.

4. It is farther to be noticed that the rights created by the legislation of a church may be enforced by the courts of civil law. A church's laws are practically contracts made with each individual who becomes a member, and as such they can seize upon all the authority for their enforcement which is ever given to enforce any contract. A person's membership with his church is, therefore, a most sacred right, and may not be set aside in a light or easy manner, but only in harmony with the regular laws of the church itself. The civil power can compel a church to keep its own laws.

MAJORITIES.

Now these limitations of the legislative power of churches are of the greatest possible consequence, for they compel us to recognize that ecclesiastical law must be something more than simply the will of the ecclesiastical majority. Many declarative statements of that majority mean only that a certain number of persons happening to be together, agree in certain opinions. They rule nobody. They have no effect except as

clearly expressed opinions, good or bad, may exert an influence. The majority must always distinctly apprehend just what is and what is not within the grasp of its authority, otherwise its affirmations may become ridiculous.

In all deliberative bodies it is common to hear men insist, not only upon the power, but also upon the rights of the majority. Many persons seem to think that the decision of a simple majority of all the persons engaged in a deliberation is a law unto all engaged therein—that it is the divine right of the majority to be obeyed, and that a society or a church needs never to look beyond its own membership for any law to regulate the conduct of that membership on any subject whatever that may arise.

Now, as a matter of fact, the majority has no natural right to be obeyed, unless, indeed, the fact that the physical force of the majority would probably be sufficient to pound the minority into an obedient frame of mind, may be considered as constituting a natural right. In barbarous ages, when the smaller number could not carry out their own ideas, they rushed to arms, and sometimes they were thrashed into obedience; but sometimes, though not the greatest in number, they proved to be the most formidable in brute force, and so carried their opinions into practice, so far as society had any coherence. Now the minority has yet the same natural right to decide matters in question in that way, except that the moral sense of mankind has decided that it is not the best way. Accordingly, without war, by a convention it is allowed to

the greatest number to have their way for the time; but it remains to the minority to use all peaceable means to break up the majority, by persuading the individuals that compose it that they were in error. The rule of a majority would in every case be as rank and intolerable a tyranny as was ever perpetrated in any age, if, on a decision being reached by a majority, the minority were tied hand and tongue against any attempt ever to reverse the decision. Instead of anything so harsh, the smallest number accept peace on what they regard as a wrong basis, until they can prevail upon the greatest number so to reconstruct their decision as to maintain harmony upon a right basis.

But for this right of the minority to continue their agitation, slavery would yet everywhere prevail; the temperance reform would be in utter despair; and the greatest changes in the British constitution would never have been effected, however much they have been to the advantage of mankind.

It is, therefore, evident that the harmony of society is greatly promoted by the fact that in the legislation of churches and incorporated societies the decisions of the majority are limited by the laws of state, so far as that this majority may not in any way interfere with any man's civil rights, and that there is a power outside the body itself which can compel it to keep its own laws and prevent the possibility of an accredited member being deprived of his proper rights as a member so long as he conducts himself in harmony with the legitimate regulations of the body.

ACTUAL CHURCH CONSTITUTIONS AND LAWS.

This paper has been steadily moving toward a brief study of the actual constitutions of free and independent churches in modern times, and more especially in Canada.

The characteristic idea of civilization in the era of the Reformation was personal liberty, or the right of independent judgment by the individual. The consequence was, that, in opposition to the traditions of all the Christian centuries, Protestantism broke up into many separate organizations. Each developed itself around some central thought, or sprang into life under some peculiar circumstances. Hence a number of different ecclesiastical systems. All of these embrace,

1. Laws which are constitutional; and
2. Those which are disciplinary.

The first class includes all regulations designed to preserve the existence of the church under a proper organization. A church cannot exist without them. The people who call themselves brethren, and who rail against all organized churches, recognize such laws as a foundation for the discipline by which they expel members.

These constitutional provisions may be again classified according to different ideas of church government. There are:

1. Those which relate to organizations in which a single congregation is the whole church; and
2. Those which relate to organizations which embody an indefinite number of congregations in one great connexion.

Of the first of these we shall not speak. They are societies in the simplest form. Each congregation is a distinct, independent republic. It is complete in itself, and for all practical ends sufficient to itself.

3. The second class offers a more complicated constitution for our study. In Canada there are at least three great connexional church organizations, viz.: the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, and the Methodist Church.

The following outline of their constitutions indicates the relation which the different parts of each sustain to the other parts, as well as the likeness which, as wholes, they bear to each other:

Church of England. Presbyterian Church. Methodist Church.

<i>Provincial Synod.</i>	<i>General Assembly.</i>	<i>General Conference.</i>
<i>Diocesan Synod.</i>	<i>Synod.</i>	<i>Annual Conference.</i>
<i>Vestry.</i>	<i>Presbytery.</i>	<i>District Meeting.</i>
	<i>Session.</i>	<i>Official Board.</i>

The Provincial Synod is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the ecclesiastical province. This province does not recognize political boundaries at all, one ecclesiastical province embracing the five oldest provinces of the Dominion. This synod is divided into two houses. The upper includes all the bishops holding sees within the province, one of whom is the Metropolitan, and the President of the Synod. He is elected Metropolitan by the bishops of the province. The lower house includes the delegates chosen by the clergy and the laity within the province, presided over by a Prolocutor, elected out of their own number. No

proposition has the sanction of the Provincial Synod until it is approved by both the upper and lower house. Every clergyman, on his ordination, binds himself to abide by the canons of the Provincial Synod, as well as those of the synod of his own diocese.

The Diocesan Synod includes the bishop of the diocese, all the clergy within its bounds, and the duly elected representatives of the laity. The legislation of this body is all subject to the veto of the presiding bishop. It can enact nothing to which he is not an assenting party. Here, then, is a church ruled by an episcopacy of the most pronounced character.

Turning to Presbyterianism, we have a striking contrast. This represents the extreme result of the Reformation. The Calvinists of Germany and Switzerland were not satisfied with any half-way measures of reform. They were determined to sweep away wholly all the pretensions of popery, and even of episcopacy, which they regarded as a part of popery. They restored to the world the example of a liberal, democratic, church government. The constitution of the Presbyterian Church is built around the congregation. It was constituted the unit. Its life and prosperity were esteemed of paramount importance. For it all else should exist. The session stands for the congregation, of which it administers all the spiritual affairs. The temporals are committed to the hands of a board of managers. The name, "Presbytery" is, of course, from the Scriptures, and the body which it defines is pastoral, and not legislative; exercising a more particular

oversight of separate congregations than the Methodist District Meeting does, and surpassing the functions of that body to the extent of electing and ordaining men to the work of the ministry. In this particular it is on a parallel with the functions of the Methodist Annual Conference, and by so much the Presbyterian Synod is less than the Annual Conference.

Methodism was a growth purely out of practical necessity. It had, on the one hand, no fear of contamination from popery, and, on the other, no special desire to be pleasing to the government of the day. Hence, it made no compromises, and represents no extremes. The names of its courts are original and descriptive in the current language of the time. They make no pretence of scripturalness, nor do they claim any recognition from ecclesiastical history. The eternal safety of the individual is the motive in the light of which its whole system is to be interpreted.

The dependence of the lower upon the higher courts is carried out more fully by Presbyterianism than by either of the other bodies. In the former, the record of every court must be reviewed annually by the next higher court, whether there is any appeal or not. In addition to this, attention may be drawn to any particular proceedings by reference, or by appeal, or complaint. Of course, there is neither appeal nor review above the General Assembly.

But the other two bodies content themselves with a consideration of the proceedings of lower courts only when attention is called thereto by appeal. This, of course, does not apply to recommendations which come

from the lower to the higher in regular course. And neither the Provincial Synod nor the General Conference is an appellate court. Any matter which demands a hearing beyond the Diocesan Synod or the bishop's court, or, in the Methodist Church, beyond the Annual Conference, is heard by a duly constituted court of appeal, called by the Church of England the Metropolitan's Court, and which is so admirably constituted, that its judgments cannot but be of more value than the judgments of any mixed assembly.

The constitution of the Methodist court of appeal is subject to change by the legislation of any General Conference, and, therefore, the form of it is not a part of the fixed constitution of the church.

UNITY POSSIBLE.

A question demanding the most thoughtful consideration of good men to-day is the possible union of these three great ecclesiastical organizations. We have come upon times marked by much religious feeling, and of mighty activity in all movements which look toward the evangelization of the whole world. In the presence of the great throbbing pulsations of charity, and the light which well-grounded hope flings toward a better day, the needless divisions of Christendom are to-day the food of satire, the temptation of the scoffer, and the grief of good men and angels. A growing tendency to conduct charitable and missionary and all philanthropic enterprises independently of denominational organizations, and the preference of many of the most benevolent Christians for operations wholly

outside of even their own church, indicates a danger that the children, in the form of benevolent enterprises which have been created by the church, will yet succeed in devouring the body that gave them birth; and is full of the suggestion of an all-embracing union of the forces of Christendom to meet the pressing demands of this unrestful age. Is there piety enough to lift Christians of every name above the devotion to mere forms and methods into a united and stupendous effort to grasp the whole human race for Christ?

The preparation for a general unification has been made in the toning down of the sharp corners of doctrinal differences, until, in practical work, they now amount to but little. Why should not a great church arise, which, while holding to the few points of doctrinal truth which are really essential to Christianity, would leave to individual thought the utmost freedom of action? Methodism has learned that there is room for much variety in statement within her standards. Calvinism has discovered a way of preaching as free a salvation as has ever been heard. What matters it if Presbyterians call their free grace Calvinism instead of Arminianism, so long as it amounts to the same thing? Arminians would not be an offence to Calvinists if they should still hold that Adam fell, and Judas, once genuinely converted, was certainly lost, and that Hymenæus and Alexander made shipwreck of faith; but, at the same time, go so far toward final perseverance, as to admit that probably comparatively few of those who are truly converted, do so far turn away from God as to be finally lost.

The points of agreement are essentials, the differences are about non-essentials. The separate bodies are learning to recognize more and more the substantial good in both life and doctrine of each other. When this movement goes so far that Christ can be seen by ninety-nine Christians out of every hundred towering above all systems and parts of systems, and temporal economies, then the mountains will flow together. Protestantism will be one. Romanism as a system will perish.

So far as ecclesiastical constitutions are concerned, such a union of the forces of Christendom is certainly possible without greater sacrifices than Christian love can make.

1. First of all, men must be willing to remove from church government everything which greatly offends human nature, unless it is necessary to preserve the existence of the ecclesiastical body. Some men will be offended with anything that pertains to a church; but there is no room to doubt that each of the great church organizations has, lying outside the provision it makes for the spiritual life of men, some things in its regulations and forms which do needlessly give offence to men willing to love the church. For example, the fellowship of good men which the class-meeting represents, is of God, but any one form of realizing it is not of God, but of men; and, therefore, to say that legal membership with the church shall be tested by attendance upon such a service as the class-meeting, must awaken strange questionings in many minds, and result in their turning away from a service which

they may admit to be in itself good, because it occupies a position which appears to claim for it the fulfilment of the whole law—the embodiment of all virtues. So also an itinerant system, whose advantages all Christendom is probably prepared to admit, may become an offence to good men, when the rule under which it is worked practically claims infallibility for itself. Could not Methodism advance one step toward a union of all denominations by preserving all that the class-meeting stands for, and giving to its itinerant plan an elasticity in working which would come nearer to the meeting of all the conditions which of necessity do arise?

Any law which shows itself as a law, instead of showing the end for which it exists, is a hindrance to the spirit of Christianity. The church aims at ends, not methods, and the more nearly it can come to the realization of its ends without any exhibition of methods at all, without men knowing that they are led thitherward by law, the more perfectly will it use Christ's own method.

2. All that is not essential to the church's existence and life must be allowed to drop out if need be. No legislators ever needed a more wise discrimination than the men to-day who hold influence in the churches. Systems, laws, are not the church. Methodism, for example, is equivalent to free and full salvation through the atonement, and a living, spiritual religion, illustrated by personal testimony. It originated in a protest against nothing but sin. It began by sacrificing everything that it might save souls. And looking to this end, its peculiarities grew upon it by a principle

of natural accretion. The maintenance of these peculiarities is not essential to the maintenance of the spiritual life to which this church has ever borne testimony. Now, the churches of Christendom might to-day so modify their polity as to bring all the great connexional organizations into perfect unity, and yet not touch anything in any of them which dwells in the inmost sanctuary of its life. And even then, enough of the non-essential peculiarities of each would be retained to prevent anyone from feeling that he had lost his mother-church. All of them have some things in method or form which have outlived their usefulness, and are now only a prop to phariseeism. The original pharisee was possible largely through the perpetuation of forms and usages which had survived the necessity which created them. The same effect will arise from the same cause now. And there is no more powerful hindrance to the union of churches which have no longer any reason for a separate existence.

3. As to polity, in a reconstruction the best parts of each might be preserved. Regarding the Methodist system as a sort of intermediate between the other two, it is certainly an intelligent commentary on both of them. Whether the Presbyterian polity is strictly scriptural or not, judged by this commentary, it is certainly adapted to the necessities of human nature, because Methodism, consulting in its polity only what was demanded by utility, grew up into almost the same form as Presbyterianism, but using wholly different descriptive terms. And Methodism furnishes a

no less favorable commentary upon the polity of the Church of England, for we have in it one of the grandest illustrations of the practical fitness of an episcopacy to meet the religious necessities of mankind. Each could contribute something of great value ; each could also, doubtless, free itself from some things which have grown to be rather an incumbrance than a blessing. As to the names of courts, high and low, a general surrender might be made in favor of those which are richest in historic associations. The present enlightened age would discover no prejudice against such a choice, on account of the fact that those terms were intimately associated with the church through every period of popish domination. Presbyterianism retained the useful word synod, although it had been used for ages in the church while abjectly subject to the authority of the Pope. Considering the thoroughness of the Reformation effected by Calvinism, it is a little surprising that it could have consented to come so near to popery as to wear one of the terms it used. It need not now greatly object to employ the same term as descriptive of all its great courts, if such a change would aid in promoting a union of Christendom.

EPISCOPACY.

The greatest difficulty to be overcome is the Episcopacy. So far as in the Church of England it is held that the episcopal form of government is clearly defined in the Scriptures, and that an uninterrupted succession of ordinations by bishops can be traced in history from the time of the apostles, and that, therefore, some

special grace is received in the act of ordination, that church is unapproachable. It is not possible that other bodies can come into any union much nearer to it. They deny that there is more than one order of clergy. All who are ordained at all are equal in their rights and functions. The highest officer of the church, the Moderator of the General Assembly, or President of the General Conference, is a minister of no higher rank than any ordained pastor. He differs from the other clergy only as the Metropolitan differs from the other bishops. The Metropolitan is the President of the Provincial Synod, and chief by election in the House of Bishops, and enjoys certain rights of precedence, but they do not arise out of his ordination.

Is it not possible, on the one side, to grant that bishops are created by election, and not by ordination? Cannot the historic facts relative to a direct line of successive ordinations, all the way down from Peter to the present time, be left open without any theory of explanation, and so each have perfect freedom in his interpretation of those facts?

Then, on the other side, it can assuredly be admitted that episcopacy has as much favor from what the Scriptures clearly teach on the subject of church government as any other system; and that the growth and development of it from any germs sown in apostolic times were natural and necessary; and that it was the wisest provision for the welfare of Christianity during the ages which depended wholly upon it to preserve all that was of value to mankind, in the face of gross ignorance and aggressive barbarism.

In addition to this, much can be said in favor of the practical advantages of episcopacy under the conditions of life now existing.

First of all, it furnishes an upper house to the highest legislative body in the church. If the methods of legislation employed by all civilized nations, which require the consideration of every subject separately by two distinct bodies, and the sanction of both before any enactment can be enforced, is a wise arrangement, assuredly the legislation of churches would be improved by the conservative influence of an upper house. Here, more than in national parliaments, there is danger of hasty legislation evolved in the last hours of a weary sitting of Conference or Assembly, and of motions carried through personal considerations, rather than by a regard to the good of the whole body.

Then it would secure to the great councils of the church competent presiding officers, well qualified for their special duties. Comparatively few men have a taste for the study of constitutional questions and rules of order, independently of any necessity to make any practical use of such special information. The consequence is that each new Moderator or President comes to his office with the feeling that his fitness for his new sphere is to be tested under very trying circumstances. He may walk the plank just once. Next year he may not come back and correct the failures into which his inexperience led him this year.

But let any man know that to preside in great assemblies, to rule on points of order, and to give judgment on constitutional questions, is to be a part of his

special duties in life, not for a single year, but for many years, and he will easily acquire the special preparation necessary for this difficult part of his work. Nor will there be any particular honor in being prepared for any emergency which may arise. It was only to be expected that he would be ready for it. But under the plan which elects a fresh ruler for each Conference or Assembly, if said ruler acquits himself worthily in some difficult corner, it is a marvel that he should be found ready for something for which there was no reason why he should be ready. It was outside the line of his imperative and daily duties that he should have made preparation for this special and difficult work.

Leaving Presbyterianism out of the question for the moment, it is undeniable that episcopacy has proved itself well adapted to the needs of Methodism. It furnishes an ideal stationing committee. The constitution of this body is certain to be the subject of much heated discussion in the future. The admission of laymen into it, or the permanent exclusion of them from it, will neither remedy its defects nor heal the differences of opinion concerning it. The appointments will still be made by men who are interested in them. Probably little would be gained by transferring the appointing power partly from ministers, who are personally interested, to laymen who are also personally interested. But the Episcopal Methodism of the United States in the meantime is free from any difficulties arising from the interest in the appointments of those who make them, except as the general welfare of the

church may be an interest. Here, the men finally responsible for the appointments are entirely independent of those whom they appoint. They want no man's vote for anything. They are not in a position to receive any such favor. So that, though men go to hard appointments, and feel that they have not received as good as they deserve, and though churches do not secure just the men they desired, yet all alike must feel that the appointing power was moved only by a regard for the good of the church. Before that consideration the burden of disappointment vanishes. Men will endure for Christ's sake what would be worse than death if it came from the hands of men as a punishment, edged by a sense of being unappreciated according to worth.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

The conditions upon which membership with a church is secured and retained are properly a part of the constitution of the church.

Here are points of difference worthy of some thought, while at the same time there is greater unanimity than upon any other point of church government. The Church of England and Presbyterianism substantially agree with each other in making Baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the conditions of membership. The highest privileges attainable in the Church of England, as for example, election to the synods,* are conditioned upon having received the communion a certain number of times in the year, except

* Constitution, p. 3.

where it was not possible. The Presbyterian Church institutes a preliminary inquiry into the religious life of the applicant,* but after reception the rights of membership are retained on the condition of attending the communion, unless they are cut off by proper process of discipline.

Assuredly a strong argument for the correctness of this test may be based upon the original institution of this holy sacrament. The Lord took with Him on this occasion His apostles, who were to be the future teachers of His church. He instructed them that this service was to be with them forever a testimony of their love for Him, manifested in an effort, by the simple process of eating bread and drinking wine, to preserve the memory of His name and work to mankind through all the ages. It is to be supposed that none will come to this solemn service but those who are actuated by love to Christ, and a filial desire to obediently remember His words, and His sacrificial work for mankind, and for themselves personally. It is, therefore, a searching test of sincerity of purpose. It is true a hypocrite may easily avail himself of its advantages as a cloak for vileness, dishonesty or falsehood; but so may he of any test which can be devised; and inasmuch as men are not required to act in the capacity of the judge of each other's secret thought and intention, and are utterly unqualified to do so under any conditions which can possibly be created, the hypocrite must be left to the Judge of all the earth for his detection and his punishment.

* Rules, etc., p. 7.

Methodism stands alone in its conditions of membership. It is in this, as in every other part of its polity. Nothing was planned, and then reduced to practice, but all grew up as practical necessity suggested. The class-meeting, in its nature and in its legal function as a test of membership in the church, is a striking illustration of this. If a score of men should give themselves up to meditation with a view to the discovery of the best possible condition upon which membership with a church should be retained, it is doubtful if any one of them all would, out of his original thinking, create the Methodist class-meeting exactly as it is, and offer it as the best possible means of keeping bad people out of the church, and of bringing good people in. But as a growth, without any person knowing at its origin just what it would grow into, its functions are intelligent and natural. Without a knowledge of the history of that growth, no intelligent interpreter would assign it the place which belongs to it by the usage of interpretation. He would not find in it the condition of continued membership with the church.

The law relating to the class-meeting reads as follows: "If any of the members of our church wilfully and repeatedly neglect to meet in class, let the superintendent or his assistant visit them whenever it is practicable, and explain to them the consequence if they continue to neglect, viz., exclusion."*

Now, as it stands, a new comer to the book would

*Discipline (1886), p. 40.

find some difficulty in determining that no man who "wilfully and repeatedly neglects to meet in class" can be a legal member of the Methodist Church. The place where the law is found would mislead him. There is a whole chapter devoted to "The Membership of the Church." Now the intelligent student would naturally expect to find in that chapter, a full statement of what the church requires of those who enter into membership, and continue therein. If they may be cut off from the church, except by a process of discipline, he would with reason expect to find in this chapter an account of the manner. But this particular law, which by customary interpretation bears so intimate a relation to church membership, is not found in the chapter which deals with that subject at all. It appears in the next chapter, which deals with the "Means of Grace." This fact would create the impression that the class-meeting is simply one among a number of methods of promoting piety, and that the "exclusion" referred to in the passage quoted above must relate to the particular means of grace under consideration in the passage in which it occurs.

Yet another misleading fact would be found in what is called the "General Rules of Our United Societies." As the superintendent of a circuit is under obligation to give a copy of them to all who become members of the church when they join, it would reasonably be supposed that these rules teach new members how they are to conduct themselves if they retain their membership. Among other things they declare that all who desire to continue in these

societies shall continue to evince their desire for salvation by attending upon all the ordinances of God." Then are specified, "The public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; fasting or abstinence." That is all. The class-meeting is not mentioned here at all. This would create the impression that it is of minor importance, even among the means of grace. If any confirmation of this view of the case were needed it would seem to be found in the fact that these general rules are deemed of such importance, and also so perfect in their scope, that they are incorporated in the constitution of the church by special provision; and can only be changed, even in the slightest degree, by the same majority of the General Conference which could reconstruct the whole constitution of the church. In view of all these facts, it is exceedingly doubtful if one accustomed to exact use of language, and to the interpretation of legal forms, but wholly ignorant of traditional Methodism, would recognize the class-meeting as by law the test of membership with the church. Nevertheless, he who would urge the contrary from the above considerations would be accused by an old Methodist of cavilling.

It must be, therefore, that we are to find the legal import of the class-meeting some way involved in the history of its development. We go back then to the first class-meeting. Wesley had organized within the Established Church a society, purely for the mutual spiritual improvement of those who belonged

to it. Branches of this society multiplied. A building had been erected in Bristol to provide a suitable place of meeting. It was burdened with a debt. The members of the society consented to pay each a penny a week toward the removal of this debt. One person agreed that he would either collect this amount from eleven others, or pay it himself for them if they were really too poor to do so.* The twelve were called a class. The whole membership of the society was divided into similar classes. At first, the member responsible for the money, who was called the leader, visited each member of his class at home once a week, on his errand. There had been trouble through the bad living of some members. It seemed a suitable thing that the leader, on his weekly visit, should inquire of each as to his own life and that of others. At this stage the class was just the same method of looking after individuals, and exercising oversight of them, which is employed in the Presbyterian Church. In that church each elder has a charge over all the communicants and adherents within a certain district.† The only difference is that the Methodist class-leader was expected to visit each of his members once every week. But in a little time they adopted the plan of meeting together, when each paid his penny, and they talked faithfully with each other, pointing out faults, warning and encouraging one another, and praying together.

It was between three and four years‡ after the first

* Wesley's Works, Vol. V., p. 179. † Rules, etc., p. 7.

‡ May 1st, 1743.

society was formed that the general rules above referred to were prepared. They were designed only for members of the societies. But all the members of the societies met in the classes. The general rules, therefore, did not apply to any who did not attend the classes, and so it was in no sense necessary that those rules should mention the class-meeting among the means of grace, since it was only by going to class that anyone would know anything at all of the rules. Also, by neglecting the class-meeting repeatedly he forfeited his connection with the society. But he was just where he was before he joined it. He was a member of the Church of England. He forfeited no right as a church member by being excluded from the Methodist society, for these people were all at the same time members both of the Established Church and of the Methodist society. Methodism was only a society within a church.

Now, lift all these branch societies bodily out of the bosom of the national church, and set them down as in themselves an independent church, but subject to just exactly the same rules and regulations as when they were only a society within a church. Under these new conditions we perceive at once that attendance upon the class-meeting will have so far increased its importance as to be the condition of continued membership in a church. Before this event, if a person was excluded from the Methodist society he was still a member of the great national church. If any are now tempted by the theory that the same exclusion must still mean what it has always meant; and that,

therefore, the person excluded from the class remains, nevertheless, a member of the great and wide fraternity of Methodism, as before, of the Church of England, he must learn that there has never been any such fraternity including more than the class. What that includes constitutes organized Methodism. It is true that it was no part of the design of those who originally created the class-meeting that it should have legal functions of such importance attached to it, but, like everything else in the Methodist polity, this was a providential growth.

At any stage the fathers in the church might have introduced the pruning knife, and either have cut off this law of "exclusion" entirely, or have so altered it as to meet the new conditions as they arose. But the fact is that these framers of a new ecclesiastical constitution felt that all the way through their system was in a marked manner the creation of Providence; and they feared any changes by legislative enactment which were not clearly indicated by Providence. And as Providence has never seemed to direct a change in the function of the class-meeting it still remains as at first it was constituted.

It is unquestionable that with growing, general intelligence, with better parental training, and the teaching of the Sunday-schools, neither at the present time is there generally among the members of the Methodist Church, or of any other, need for close questioning of one Christian by another as to the purity and honesty of his life, nor would such prying into purely personal matters be endured. Hence the testimonies of the class-meet-

ing have come in the present time to be little more than a relation of individual experiences of the mercy and Providence of God, and of efforts and successes and failures in various paths of Christian endeavor. The legal import of the class-meeting is at the same time being gradually modified, not by legislation, but by usage. When any are deprived of the rights of membership for "wilfully and repeatedly neglecting to meet in class," it is the duty of the superintendent of the circuit to declare the fact publicly in the church, at the same time guarding the moral character of the person excluded against any imputation. But such a process is now almost unheard of. The reasonable inference is that in the Methodist Church, usage, yielding to new conditions, is preparing the way for legislative enactment, which will, doubtless, in due time, bring this body into harmony with other churches as to the conditions of membership, without its either abandoning the guards it has ever set over the spiritual life, or neglecting that direction of Providence which has been its wisdom and security at every turn in its past glorious history.

DISCIPLINE.

At a previous point in this discussion a division was made between those laws ecclesiastical, which are of a constitutional nature, and those which relate to discipline. These are regulations designed to conserve the spiritual life and power of the church, and to promote morality and virtue. They not only affirm the positive precepts of morality enjoined in every part

of the sacred Scriptures; but they also attempt to declare in order what rules of holy living may be legitimately deduced from the principles taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles; and they assert the lowest standard of morality which is consistent with membership in the church at all.

They may be divided into two classes. There are

1. Those which are based upon positive precepts of the Bible, and, therefore, admit of no doubt or contradiction.

2. Those which are inferential, and relate to doubtful things.

As to the first class there can be no difference of opinion. All who partake of the Christian spirit at all, admit that fraud, and falsehood, and theft, and murder, and vileness, are inconsistent with a Christian profession. No church can make an act a crime which the law of God does not make a crime, nor take away the guilt of what the Bible declares to be wrong. At this point all churches touch a line of unity. They affirm the Decalogue. They can also unite in a statement, with some orderly classification of its contents, as to what the Bible declares to be guilty or innocent.

But, nevertheless, the practice of different churches in dealing with those who transgress these positive precepts of morality, recognized by all, differs widely.

In the Church of England, ample provision is made for the bringing of a bishop to trial for immorality, the dissemination of false doctrine, or for canonical disobedience. No system of jurisprudence could pro-

vide anything apparently more complete and fair. In addition, an Imperial Act of 1840, adopted as far as it is suitable to Canada, provides for discipline in the case of all clergymen inferior in rank to bishops. The church also asserts the propriety of discipline in the case of laity, as well as clergy, for canonical offences; but it seems not to have provided, though fully authorized to do so, for the disciplinary treatment of moral offences committed by the laity.

The provisions for the exercise of discipline go far enough to assert the conviction of the absolute necessity of moral purity in both laity and clergy, but leave so much wholly open as to indicate a doubt of the wisdom of a church calling its members to account for aberrations from the right path.

The Presbyterian Church indicates a similar hesitancy in its warning against "undue solicitude to pry into private conduct or family concerns, or to interfere in personal quarrels, or to engage in the investigation of secret wickedness." Nevertheless, this church has a very thorough system of most admirable provisions for the trial and punishment of both clergy and laity, guilty of any practices or deeds inconsistent with the Gospel. With this church, five years is the limitation within which accusations must be brought and pursued; otherwise, except in very heinous crimes, the offence must be left with the conscience of the guilty party. In the Church of England the period is limited to two years.

The Methodist Church shows in the department of discipline, as in the class-meeting, its characteristic

thought of the individual. One indication of this is the fact that the book which other churches call their constitution, rules, etc., the Methodist Church calls its Discipline; but the word must be now understood in a wider than its ecclesiastical sense. This church provides for the most thorough investigation into the conduct, in relation to morality, of all its members, both clerical and lay; for the correction, by adequate punishment, of offences against the Word of God, and for the removal from positions where they can work evil of those who do not obey its laws and regulations. Having a system which demands, in its efficient working, the most thorough obedience at many points, it has found it necessary to work by rule, instead of allowing its rules to be disregarded. It has no limitation of time within which accusations must be brought and sustained.

Now, it may be deemed unwise, as in some cases it seems to be, to deal with offences committed by the laity against morality; but of the right of a church to pursue such offending members with appropriate punishment, there can be no doubt. Such a practice lies fully within all the principles by which ecclesiastical legislation in independent bodies is limited. Nor does there appear to be much ground to question the wisdom of this course, if the church attempts to maintain any moral standard at all. If its aim is to be simply a vast, social organization, more or less affected with the salt of Divine truth, making way for spiritual currents, but not especially seeking to promote them, then its peculiar mission will not be

greatly hindered by the irregular lives of some of its members; but if its aim is to stand face to face with individuals, to win sinful men, warning them personally, and entreating them earnestly to seek a better life, then the foulness of one man, clerical or lay, may neutralize the influence of all its appeals. This has been experienced again and again.

But, if possible, a graver and more difficult question is the relation which a church's legislation should bear toward those things which in themselves cannot be regarded as positively sinful, but which may prove destructive to the religious life if habitually indulged in, and which cannot but be injurious to a person's Christian influence. They are not positively forbidden by the Word of God, but to say the least they are of a doubtful character. In its recognition of such subjects the Methodist Church stands alone. Its legislation definitely covers all things which may become an occasion of offence. It distinctly declares that,

"The general rules are to be understood as forbidding neglect of duties of any kind, imprudent conduct, indulging in sinful tempers or words, the buying, selling or using intoxicating liquors as a beverage, dancing, playing at games of chance, encouraging lotteries, attending theatres, horse-races, circuses, dancing parties, patronizing dancing-schools, taking such other amusements as are obviously of a misleading or questionable moral tendency."

It is urged against the church exercising any legislative authority in this difficult field:

1. That these things are not actual sins. Assuredly,

no one could rank attendance at a pleasure dance, or the playing a game of whist, with lying, or theft, or murder. It would be exceedingly dogmatic to assert that no man could be saved if he should die at a theatre, no matter what the circumstances might be; or that if he should cease to live while swallowing whiskey, or playing cards, or looking at a horse-race, he must inevitably perish. But if a person should end his days in the act of trying to take another man's life, or in adultery, or profanity, no charity could find a way for his salvation. Hence, when the positive prohibitions of a church extend to these things which merely indicate an evil tendency in the heart and life, which may develop into all manner of evil and vice, or possibly, may not go so far, it is claimed that such laws class evil tendencies with positive sins, and thus by implication make that to be a sin which God does not make a sin. That is a higher function than any church has a right to assume.

2. That where there is a proper spirit of piety, and a deep, fervent religious life, such laws are unnecessary, because each person will know and feel in himself what is right in relation to all things of a doubtful nature. Of this statement, as a matter of fact, there can be no manner of doubt. When moral influences are dominant, when the church is charged with a high degree of spiritual life and power, there will be no danger of its members running into evil or sin along any of these tracks. When revival influences prevail, the whole membership of a church rises into a clearness of moral perceptions, and a forcefulness of moral

endeavor, which lifts them fully up to the level of all the requirements of morality, whether written or unwritten. People would then do all, and more than all, that is required by any written laws on such points, and as readily if nothing is written, as if regular declarative rules are on the books of the church. And if the church cannot be kept at a sufficient fervor of devotion to desire to avoid all appearance of evil, then it will not regard laws on subjects of a doubtful nature, even if they do exist; and so existing and disobeyed, they must do more harm than good.

3. That such legislation tends to weaken Christian character, and to prevent its vigorous development, by removing any opportunity for the exercise of discrimination. Everything in the religious life is reduced to a system of rules. The novice is put into this machine, and driven through without discernment and without growth. He may either become an unreasoning bigot, putting the rules of his church in the place of God, or his thinking nature will eventually rise up in protest against its trammels, and then he will be in danger of rushing to the opposite extreme.

For such reasons this field is left open by most churches. Many clergymen in every denomination warn as faithfully against the first step in the way that may end in evil as do Methodist preachers, many laymen and their families may abstain as scrupulously, but they deem it wise to say nothing in the way of ecclesiastical legislation, but to leave the whole to the individual conscience to indulge or abstain.

But, on the other hand, it may be said in favor of legislation on these subjects :

1. That no church does constantly retain the spiritual fervor necessary to secure obedience to all moral precepts through its own inward impulse towards goodness. Failing in this, it is better to keep the form of moral purity by rule than not to have it at all. These rules are then a memorial of what has been, an imperfect indication of what ought to be, and they keep alive in the hearts of devout men a hope of what shall be.

2. They are useful at all times for the purpose of education. Even when the spiritual life of a people is so strong that they would do all that morality requires if there were no commandments, some will not know what really constitutes Christian morality, and they need the instruction which plainly written rules alone can afford. And even in the most intelligent communities, there are many so constituted that they must work by rule. They are incapable of discerning and applying great principles for themselves. So far as their church marks out the way, they will walk in it in happy obedience. It is for them to obey all that their church commands, which they do cheerfully. But if their church provides them no rules, they will simply make some particular individual their rule, and go by him in all things. They cannot do otherwise. Now, it is better that a number of the wisest and best men of a church should make rules for such as cannot walk without rule, than that they should be left to copy the warped character and

notions of some one person, whose vanity and conceit, may be, make him forward to lay down rules for all who will heed.

3. Again, this class of laws represents the church's high ideal of what the outward life of a Christian ought to be. All ethics is the science, not of what human life is, but of what it ought to be. Why may not this class of legislation be as valuable as any other ethical teaching? It exhibits to the world the standard to which the church attains in its best members in their best moments. This is better than a blank, which may be understood to mean that there is no conviction, no striving after anything better than what is.

We are not without Scriptural example for this education by a high ideal. The uniform method exhibited in the Bible is the leading of men forward by showing them higher things than they have yet reached. The Decalogue itself was only an ideal standard to the chosen people through many centuries. Up to the time when it was written they had no education but that received through generations of bondage, and they were intellectually, morally, and in every way incapable of rising at once to the requirements of a law so just and equal as the ten commandments, which, indeed, is a higher statute than the morality of the present enlightened age fully satisfies. It is not, therefore, a proper occasion of surprise to discover in the lives of those to whom this law was first given many violations, not only of its spirit, but of its letter also. The pictures in the Old Testament of rare acts of obedience, where the life of Israel rose to its best, must

not be taken as indicating the tone of obedience which generally and habitually prevailed. The Sabbath was not always the "holy of the Lord and honorable" by any means. Some of the leading and best illuminated men of the age and nation at times are found to follow very confused notions on the subject of adultery. It was only after weary centuries of the most severe discipline that the fatal root of idolatry was destroyed. With this law recorded in the temple, the masses of the people lived in open violation of its requirements. When after many wide wanderings and guilty backslidings they were led back to the law, for a time they would remember the altar, and sacrifice, and Sabbath, and duty to God and man; and by every such return something new and better entered into the nation's life. It was pitched at a higher key. We trace, distinctly defined, a growth in spiritual discernment and sensibility between the days of Joshua, and Isaiah and Jeremiah. The words of the later prophets on the subject of the Sabbath, for example, are in a tone much clearer than those of the earlier days. It required thousands of years of discipline to bring that favored people up to the standard God had given them. But during all these ages the law was the ideal standard of moral excellence. A few of the most enlightened and spiritual no doubt lived up to it all the time. All of them, probably, in their best moments, touched its line sometimes. But complete and universal obedience to it was ever a dream of the future.

The Sermon on the Mount represents human life pitched upon the staff an octave higher than the Deca-

logue. All good men admit, in thought and intention, that it shows only what life ought to be. The best of men sometimes rise to its level. But all fail of living up to all its requirements always. Many cannot go so far as to admit even that it was designed that men in the present state should ever expect to attain unto it. It is undoubtedly a rule, whose requirements are to be realized, but it is yet only an ideal standard to the Christian church. But still it is constantly raising the life of weak, imperfect humanity to a higher plane.

Now, it is urged on behalf of inferential laws, prohibiting things which lie in the region of doubt, that, like the Sermon on the Mount, they help to keep the thoughts of men high, and that all who honestly aim at moral excellence reach a higher plane of living than they would if the eye was never lifted by the standards of the church above that to which they habitually attain.

While, therefore, some strong points may be made against any legislation by churches on subjects which the Bible does not define in plain terms, much, on the other side, may be said in favor of a clear declaration by the church of what its interpretation of the Bible is on every moral question, even to the extent of designating as evil to be avoided, things which the Word of God does not clearly condemn.

But if our judgment accepts the latter view of the case, still it remains that certain general principles should be recognized in the administration of these specific laws.

1. First of all, the enforcement of them should never

be the end contemplated in the administration of discipline. It is a mistake to suppose that anything in the form of a law, which is not strictly, rigidly enforced, is an evil and a mockery. The church is a remedial institution, and it is always better to save a man than to enforce a law. And forbearance may often do more to effect the salvation of the transgressor than the infliction of the full measure of penalty upon one who has transgressed in whole or in part. This applies also to the regulation of the Methodist Church, which requires every member to attend the class-meeting. A rigid disciplinarian may go through his church, cutting off every one who has become careless in his attendance upon that useful means of grace, or who has been known to drink intoxicating liquor, or to attend some prohibited form of amusement; and, having scattered his membership right and left, he may say in triumph to his bleeding church, "I have fewer members than before, but I have enforced your laws to the very letter." He says the simple truth, and he is legally above any impeachment. Indeed, the law must praise him; but he is indicted by common sense, and by the best type of morality, with the guilt of having done a very foolish thing. He has retained all of those who stand in fear of everything bearing the name of law, but he has cut off many of those stronger characters, who discern from the heart the import and substance of true laws of morality, and who may have possibly aimed in an occasional transgression at the very end these laws contemplate. Of course this can never be true where a positive precept of the Word of God is

transgressed. In this case the penalty should not be stayed. But where the law is only an inference, the event in the past has not proved that rigid enforcement, as an end, has advanced the cause of true religion, however much it may have gratified the passion for exactness, and the disposition to measure spiritual forces by numbers, or by the carpenter's rule, of the petty hand which, for the time, held the sceptre of power.

But, it is asked, what is a rule for if not to be enforced? Why not then abolish it? Would any one propose to abrogate the Sermon on the Mount because it is not perfectly obeyed? He would find but few followers. So laws on the statute book of a church, which indicate simply a moral tendency, may do incalculable good, though sometimes transgressed, and prosecutions under them rarely occur. How this may be has already been explained. As to the vindication of law, independently of other considerations, it is a fact that every law, as indeed every man, is vindicated as long as it appears that there has been no partnership with unrighteousness. The legislation of churches receives its highest vindication from the good results which flow from it in general. Nothing of this kind can be perfect in every particular. Under the dispensation of Protestantism it is never worth while for authority to lift itself up and show its hand, merely that it may proclaim its name. What it cannot do by persuasion it will rarely accomplish by penalty. Strict law, merely held up as a moral standard, will oftener than otherwise win back to its

line those whom discipline would long before have put beyond its reach. That is, of doubtful things.

2. A second principle is that the church should be preserved. As the first duty of a national government is to preserve the nation, so those who rule the church should aim first of all at the perpetuation of its existence. All pastors have proved that it is much easier to get men out of the church than into it. Anybody can destroy a congregation. It requires wisdom, piety and power, sustained by infinite labor and thought to bring a church together and to keep it united.

It is on this principle that a church is justified in cutting off ministers who have departed from its standards of doctrine. Where doctrine is the basis of the church's attack upon the world—and it is difficult to conceive of any other adequate basis—to undermine the people's confidence in doctrine is practically to destroy the church. And so all forms of law are designed, and should be used, to perpetuate the church and not to destroy it.

3. The purity of the church must be maintained. There is much crying out for a liberal, popular church. No contention is made here for the gratification of that cry. No church can afford to be liberal toward sin, nor toward principles which with the growth of a century will encourage sin. Nor can a church afford to be without standards of moral purity. To profess nothing is to surrender to the enemy of righteousness. And standards may assuredly be abolished by total neglect.

There are periods when there is little spiritual life in the church, and men's senses are slow to discern the right path. The great principles of truth are misapplied, and explained away. At such a time the church may reaffirm the mighty, conquering convictions of the purest people in its membership, by cutting off and cleansing itself from those who are wilfully impure, and who would gladly draw all down to their own level. The declaration, by a practical enforcement of its law, that bad men shall not be church members, has often been the beginning of a revival of true religion.

And even when there is an abounding religious influence, those who disregard it, and set exhortation aside with contempt, and arrogate to themselves a higher spiritual discernment than the church has expressly indicated in its rules; and yet at the same time prove, by their epicurean indulgence of themselves, that they discern nothing spiritually, will make their best contribution to the purity of the church by ceasing to be connected with it. But what immeasurable tenderness and Christlike loving-kindness is necessary in proceeding in such cases. A young pastor, with a theoretical standard before his eyes, with more of the magistrate in him than of the Christ, may seek his conception of a pure church by the heat of a flaming lash, rather than by the refining Spirit and the uplifting arms of love. The Scriptures speak much of a purifying by faith and by love and by blood, but never do they propose a purifying by law alone. There are few Savonarolas, perhaps not one living now.

And there is rarely a place for such stern spirits, saving men by wrath and cleansing them by the scourge. In this world an absolutely purified and perfected church is not to be looked for. He who teaches one person to discern the true spirit of moral excellence from his inmost soul, has done more for righteousness than if he had compelled one hundred to obey set laws of morality without loving them, or feeling in themselves their excellence or the wisdom of them.

4. Excisions from a church should be sustained by such conditions as will secure the support of the moral sense of the community. One of the most lamentable consequences of the divisions of Protestantism is the destruction, to a large degree, of the effect of church discipline. The strong rivalry in numbers, and especially the competition for the patronage of rich men, create a readiness on the part of one church to receive into membership the disciplined members of another. Hence, unless the cause for which a member is cut off is such as will be supported by the moral sentiment of truly good men in all churches, the person so cut off may go across the street, and, in a few days, be a member in full communion with a church as pure as that which cut him off; and sometimes he will gain a great increase of influence and popularity by the sentence inflicted upon him; while that church from which he has been cut off has impressed the community with its narrowness and even pettiness. What gain is there in being able to say we have vindicated the purity of the church, if truly good men cannot

discern that by our act the church is any purer? The church loses, instead of gaining, influence; the man cut off suffers no punishment, what advance is made? This is not equivalent to saying that a church should be governed, not by the deep convictions of its own members, but by public opinion; but it is saying that all churches should recognize that the convictions of good men in other churches are worthy of respect as well as their own.

Nothing but a general union of Protestantism will elevate membership in the church to that dignity and value which ought, in the sacred name of Christ, to belong to it. By act of parliament the sentence of a bishop, or of an ecclesiastical court in the Church of England, is made good in law. Under such circumstances it becomes a matter of grave consequence to a man what decision concerning him may be reached by his church. A united Protestantism would give even a higher dignity to any position, or character in men, which it should recognize; and its denunciations would be a blow so severe that even a bad man would think long before he would incur such a penalty.

5. And further, excisions should have a reasonable regard to the moral welfare of all the persons immediately affected. Sometimes an adverse decision of his church in his case would break the last restraining bond which holds a man back from utter demoralization. He would rush headlong into infamy. Forbearance does not make him a perfect Christian, but it turns him away from much sin. It holds him back from the greatest evils. The great aim of the

Christian church is to heal. The man is in the hands of God as well as in the hands of the church. The Christian church is broad enough in its platform to exercise charity towards the erring. A temperance society has but the one thing to guard. If it has not total abstinence from intoxicating drinks it has nothing. But in contrast the church has the whole round of virtues. He who fails in one may yet have others to build upon, and if there be sorrow for the failure, how much there is to invite charity !

It is also worthy of consideration whether some forbearance should not be exercised in behalf of an offender's family. He himself may be so sullen as to feel no shame for his offence, or for his expulsion, while half a dozen most worthy members of his family may be plunged into the deepest shame by the occurrence.

Truly the love of Christ, and the wisdom of an anointed angel are necessary to guide the hand which administers, so that regulations which are subject of inference in relation to morals may accomplish the highest good without harm to any.

6. Finally, a church is bound by all moral considerations to bear and suffer with its members, as well as to vindicate its own character for purity by cutting them off. The fact that a man has become the subject of a scandal is not sufficient justification for a decision against him by his church. He may be innocent, but none the less will public opinion rave and call for his punishment. When such painful facts arise it is one of the most sacred duties to which a church can be

called to suffer with an afflicted member, and to walk even in shame for his sake, until in due time God shall vindicate the just. It should neglect no diligent inquiry as to the actual condition of the facts involved. It should make them known. But it dare not, in the sight of heaven, free itself from trouble and misapprehension by a decision against one who is unfortunate, but not guilty.

What, then, is the present prospect for a united church?

1. There is general agreement in all the doctrinal truths essential to Christianity, and freedom in the statement of others. Neither the Calvinistic nor the Arminian interpretation of Scripture is essential to Christianity. Neither one holds all the truth of Divine revelation. Both contain much of the truth. It is not worth a contention which has the most. But there is, undoubtedly, a great increase in the freedom of statement of the truth on both sides. Without abandoning anything essential to his system of interpretation, the preacher on either side can employ new forms to express the old truth, and not create a suspicion that he has abandoned the old landmarks. Sermons are not now preached so much to expound or defend a system, as to reach the hearts of men with the substance of the truth as it is in Jesus, and as revealed in the Bible. The ablest commentaries of recent years were not written, like the old ones, to prove the correctness of an existing system of theology, nor with a view to the creation of any new system, but to reveal the meaning of the Word of God in all its bearings.

2. In the field of religious experience there is also a manifest advance toward unity. No one has abandoned the doctrine of regeneration and sanctification through the Spirit, but men have learned that, standing on the verge of that mysterious world of the Spirit's working in the human heart, they are not wise to speak dogmatically as to the full measure of what has occurred in man when the gracious Spirit has vouchsafed His presence in a manner that admits of no doubt. We do know that regeneration changes a man from evil to good. Here there is certainty. We know that, at least in some cases, great advances are made very suddenly, and are afterwards fully maintained; but that the same work in measure takes place in every one, in the instant when he submits himself to God, we do not know. We are not certain—we cannot be—just how far God may have led a man in flooding his spirit with a great blessing. What it means to one it may not mean to another. That sanctification means living to God wholly, all can admit. But that we, with our imperfect vision, can trace the very steps by which God leads any one up to that eminence of intense devotion, and assert dogmatically that we know the contents of each impression, is open to question. But what an advance! The time was when it cost much to assert even a clear experience of regeneration. Now all preach this.

3. In the constitutions of the various churches we have seen there is a general likeness. The relations of the lower to the higher courts in each are much the same in all.

4. So far at least as practice goes, the conditions of church membership are about the same.

5. The widest remaining difference is in the extent to which the church as a body, follows the individual as a member, into his private life. In respect to minute laws for the particular government of the individual, the Methodist Church is at variance with all others, as we have fully shown. But its regulations are not a line in advance of the strong convictions of the best people in all churches. The Christian world will agree that human morality should exhibit to mankind the substance of what Christ's life was, as a man, on this earth. There is universal agreement as to the end which it is most desirable to reach, but difference of opinion as to the best method of getting there.

What shall the end be? The divisions of Protestantism have unquestionably rendered valuable service to the cause of truth and righteousness. Mighty convictions were necessary to the fighting of the great battles of civilization. If the convictions which moulded the ages did not embrace the whole truth, they nevertheless kept fast by the line of the truth. But sometimes they ran across other convictions just as certainly along the same line. But it is written in human nature, and in the nature of things, that these conflicting lines should, in time, flow together. We live in the time when this fact is being realized. The ends to be served by division have been accomplished. God from above, and the earth from beneath, are calling for a united church, to contend with problems

of greater interest to humanity than any which have yet risen above the moral horizon. In comparison with the salvation of the uncounted hundreds of millions who never saw the Bible, and never heard the name of Christ, and the proper instruction of ignorance, and the adequate relief of poverty that is worthy to be raised up, all the theological conflicts of ages are the merest trifles. The race has outgrown them. The Christian church has risen above them. The brighter day, with a promise of nobler things in its hand, is at the door.

